AL. 2.1996-68
c. 2

MANAGING CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Published by:
Information Development and Marketing Branch
Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development
8th floor, 10155 - 102 Street
Edmonton, Alberta, T5J 4L5
Telephone: (403) 422-1794, Fax: (403) 422-0408

Produced in cooperation with Alberta Economic Development and Tourism

For additional copies please contact:

Learning Resources Distributing Centre
12360-142 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T5L 4X9
Telephone: (403) 427-2767
Fax: (403) 422-9750

ISBN 0-7732-0609-4

© 1994, Her Majesty the Queen in right of the Province of Alberta, as represented by the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development

03/94 - 5M

12/94 - 5,640

CANADIANA
MAY 8 1995

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WHAT IS CULTURAL DIVERSITY? 1
Isn't it enough to be a good manager?
Business reflects the community at large
What will a culturally diverse workplace offer me as a Business person?

THE CHANGING FACE OF SOCIETY 5
Newcomers
Cultural Diversity means you and me
Mental maps
Let's get physical

MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES AND TIPS 10
Languages and communication
Interviewing for new employees
Interviewing tips
Training in groups
Training guidelines
Employee expectations

UNDERSTANDING AND MISUNDERSTANDING 15
Understanding instructions
Requests
Promises and refusals
Assertions and opinions
Resolving misunderstanding

SUMMING IT UP 17

READING LIST

Bahrain Bangladesh Barbados Belarus Belgium Belize Benin Bhutan

Barbuda Argentina Armenia Australia Austria Azerbaijan The Baha

WHAT IS CULTURAL DIVERSITY?

"Cultural diversity" means more than trying to tell the difference between "us" and "them". It's a term to describe the fact that our Canadian society is blended from an amazing and rich variety of cultures based on many different things: origin; language; religion; ethnicity; lifestyle; values and personal interests. We all learn from each other to celebrate differences in attitudes, approaches, customs, costume, cuisine, artistic traditions, beliefs and achievements.

"Cultural diversity" describes a range from newcomers from other cultures to your lifetime neighbours, from native culture to lifestyle subculture...and more. Canadian culture is not all one thing.

There's a temptation when we hear a term like "cultural diversity" to think it means everybody else but us. After all, we know our own cultural values – or do we?

This book will help you answer that question, not just generally but in relation to your business or workplace. Every workplace has its own "culture", made up of the sum of the people who work there. Learning to value everyone's abilities and backgrounds equally, learning to share with each other the things which will help make the business better, are all part of "managing cultural diversity in the workplace".

ISN'T IT ENOUGH TO BE A GOOD MANAGER?

That's the easiest question in this book. Yes, indeed, there's no difference between good management and managing cultural diversity. But a good manager needs to be aware that there are particular issues about cultural diversity that managers, employees and customers have to consider. Paying attention to those issues, and sometimes making changes to deal with them, will make your business work better.

BUSINESS REFLECTS THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE

What's the difference between businesses who make it and those who don't? One of the big differences is that those who make it are in tune with their community. They have a product the community values and will pay for, presented in a way the community respects and will support.

Attention to cultural diversity will put you more in tune with your market and make your workplace more responsive and more productive. More and more Alberta businesses recognize the importance of cultural diversity. Many small businesses are owned and operated by entrepreneurs from other countries or cultures. Companies that are conscious of the cultural diversity of their

clients, suppliers and workers have a creative edge in the marketplace.

We have 40 stores across Canada, but I can only talk about this location. I have twelve people working for me; three are from other countries. We've been hiring people from cultural minorities for five years. It's worked out well for us; I have no complaints.

About 25 per cent of our customers at this location are from other cultures. We have one chap on staff who speaks six languages and can converse with customers in their own language. He's good with everyone.

When I hire I'm more interested in personal qualities than Canadian experience. This is a sales business and you have to be personable. There's no limit to how far a person can go in our business. One immigrant was just promoted to district manager. We have people in head office from other cultures; one from the Philippines and one from Iran.

When a misunderstanding arises we sit down and talk the problem through until it is resolved. Sometimes I have to explain the way things are done in our company. For example, I had to explain to one fellow about how women are treated. I told him that in this society women are equal and I won't accept any other way.

– Leonard Tolet, Factory Carpet

Being culturally diverse could mean that the employees of the business are as varied in their cultural background as is Canadian society, or it could mean that the owners and managers of the business have made an effort to get in touch with a culturally diverse marketplace outside their walls – or outside the country – and find out what the people in that market need and how to deliver it to them well. It could mean incorporating language, approaches or successes from many cultures, or it could mean getting better at presenting your business, targetting your product and dealing with your customers in a clear, consistent way that can be understood by everyone.

Or it could mean all of the above, and more.

As a result of lower international transportation costs, tumbling trade barriers and advancements in global communication networks, pursuing clients in Jakarta or in Sao Paulo has become more the norm than the exception. No market, including our own, is considered too remote. The influence of global economies and the presence of foreign competitors will only increase as we progress toward liberalized trade policies and larger economic trading blocs. Those companies which will succeed in this new environment will have to think globally in terms of corporate objectives and in human resources. In the end, companies reaping profits...recognise that success may not always be determined by the strength of their product but the strength of their people.

– Phillipe Lavallee, Project Manager, International Trade Research and Training Program

WHAT WILL A CULTURALLY DIVERSE WORKPLACE OFFER ME AS A BUSINESS PERSON?

The fact that you're reading this book means you have asked yourself this question and are looking for answers. To find them, take a moment to think ahead. Create a vision of your business in the future. What will it look like? How will you have

responded to the constant change of Canadian society?

Because one thing is for certain: society *is* changing. In the next section, this book talks about how and why the Alberta workforce is becoming more culturally diverse. Whether your business or workplace changes too, and whether that change translates into good news for your business, is up to everyone: you, your employees or co-workers, your managers and business owners.

Although our hotel is locally owned, we hire a lot of people from other countries. Our general manager is originally from mainland China and we have people from all over the world working here. I'd say that about 70 per cent of our staff are from other countries. When I hire people I don't care if they have Canadian experience as long as they have experience.

We have no problems with our staff. Of course, some have had to study the language. Once in a while we have little language problems, but no cultural problems. There's no limit to how far someone can go here. As I said, the highest position in the hotel is General Manager and he is from another country. This is really encouraging.

There are direct benefits to hiring people from other countries in the hotel business. We have guests from all over the world, so whenever we have a problem understanding a customer, we just get one of our employees to interpret or help us out. In this business, it's an advantage to represent as many different groups as possible.

– Bonnie Grant, International Hotel

This book is not just concerned with what is usually called "the dominant culture": the largely-white, largely Christian, largely English-speaking majority. Canadian society is increasingly diverse, and small and big business comes out of every kind of cultural community.

Cultural diversity issues will look different depending on your business and your marketplace. You might be the manager of a big firm which hires many newcomers to Canada, or which chooses professionals from around the world to reach international markets. You might be a Native business owner manufacturing chopsticks for export. You might be the owner of a Chinese restaurant with many staff from Hong Kong and many Caucasian customers. You might be the Ukrainian-Canadian owner of a neighbourhood dry-cleaning firm, or the owner of the first sushi bar in town to hire a red-headed waiter. You may have inherited a family business three generations strong and be looking at bringing traditional personnel policies up to date, or you might be a brand-new business owner thinking about ways to establish a multicultural workforce. There are as many possible stories as there are readers of this book – and as many possible successes!

The multiethnic resources in this country have unlimited potential capacity to enrich our social, economic and political development. Our multicultural present and our economic future must now be brought together.

– Neil MacDonald, Ph.D.

Learning goes both ways: all cultures have successes to contribute and drawbacks to overcome. One woman who works with many cultures puts it this way: "I don't talk about 'minorities' any more. I talk about smaller majorities within the larger majority." This book offers you some things to think about and reflect on, some practical suggestions about

how to manage a culturally diverse business or workplace, and some resources where you can find more help, ideas and practical advice.

A culturally-diverse world is not always easy to live in. Sometimes people can react to differences with suspicion and conflict. However, a culturally-diverse world is an exciting one, with much potential for adventure, change and growth.

And best of all from your point of view, a culturally-diverse world is a field of opportunities for business development. You have access to an expanded and more varied labour force with a more varied skill base. You have a wider and more varied market. You have more sources of investment capital. Once you start counting, the opportunities seem to multiply.

THE CHANGING FACE OF SOCIETY

Next time you're in a crowded place, sit on a bench for a moment and look around you. The diversity you see is the new face of Canadian society. We have always called ourselves "a society of immigrants", reflecting the fact that all of us except Natives can trace our families' presence in this country to only a few generations. But those who have been here longer still tend to think of "immigrant" as the same as "newcomer." Yet many people we see on the street who look "different" have had roots here for generations, speak flawless "Canadian", and would be offended to be called newcomers.

NEWCOMERS

Let's talk first about recent immigrants, and immigration in general. Because our overall birthrate has fallen below replacement level (the level when number of births equal number of deaths) our population growth is being created by recent immigration. Native peoples are an exception to the falling birthrate: their numbers in proportion to the overall population are increasing too. Today, 15% of our population identify their roots outside Canada.

Overall, the myth of immigrants relying more on our social welfare system than Canadian born are untrue. In fact, the general unemployment rate for foreign-born Canadians remains lower than that of people born here. Immigrant women continue to participate in the workforce at a rate above Canadian women, though along with Canadian women they are underrepresented in managerial and professional jobs and have incomes lower than men.

Our history shows that immigrants bring vitality and energy that benefits us all when they choose Canada. Besides economic benefits, they enrich us culturally and strengthen our ties with other countries around the world.

– Bernard Valcourt, Minister, Employment and Immigration 1990

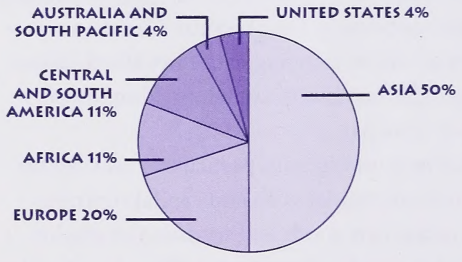
Immigrants serve as a stimulant to the economy even in recessionary periods. They add a demand for goods and services as they form households and become established. They become Canadian consumers as well as bringing to the workforce labour market skills not always available within the provinces or Canada.

Business immigrants, particularly selected for their entrepreneurial skills and capital contributions, create new goods and services and employ people who might otherwise be without work – thus enhancing economic activity. And we know that

50% of all newcomers are employed in the small business sector. That's why economic development and diversification plans include efforts to promote business immigration.

As newcomers enter the workforce, whether as owners and managers of small or big business or as employees, learning to manage cultural diversity becomes an important part of any manager's job. A smoothly-functioning workplace is everyone's goal, but different people may approach this goal in different ways. Later in this book, we'll look at ways you can use your management skills specifically to assess and improve your workplace's response to cultural diversity.

In 1991, 50% of Alberta's newcomers were from Asia, almost 20% from Europe, just over eleven per cent from Africa and Central and South America, and about four per cent from the US and Australia and the South Pacific. By the year 2000, recent immigrants and aboriginal people will account for 27% of the Alberta population. These two groups will account for 62% of Alberta's population growth. An already diverse culture will become even more so as, more and more, people share their different traditions, styles and ways of doing business.



CULTURAL DIVERSITY MEANS YOU AND ME

The previous section focusses on the role of newcomers in contributing to the cultural diversity of the economic and business community. It's important to remember, however, that cultural diversity represents all of us, including those who were born here and who may have generations of history in this land.

The very nature of Canada is multilingual, with both English and French language rights enshrined in the constitution. There are many cultural groups with long-standing traditions. Aboriginal people have deeper roots on this continent than any others, and have diverse and distinct cultures and languages. Religious groups maintain separate identities based on their faith choices, and often include separate education and even separate communities as part of those choices. Various ethnic groups who have been in this country for many generations maintain strong cultural and linguistic identities. There are other subcultures based on differences such as visible and invisible disability, race, language and lifestyle. All of these differences are considered valuable and are recognised and protected from discrimination by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.*

Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

– Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Section 15.(1)

We can all place ourselves in one of these groups. We can identify our attitudes and values and the differences between ourselves and others. The key is *how* we look at these differences.

If we haven't given it any thought, we may decide that how we think and live represents the norm, and measure everyone else against what we do ("everyone else is out of step"). As a result we may appear rigid and narrow-minded – yet usually all that's actually wrong is that we haven't yet looked at what others can teach us.

Some values are central to all cultures, and to compromise on them is to compromise our human ethics. But we can have an unfortunate tendency as humans – and as managers – to hold firmly to even our smallest habits of thought. To let go of these will free us to reach for new and better ideas which will bring us new rewards.

One thing I would really stress is it's not always "them" that are different. We have to be careful that we don't say "We have to change them." Maybe it's time we changed ourselves and realized that we are all human beings. We can learn from each other. We have to adopt a broader, global and more common culture. That's where the future of Canadian business lies.

– Alvin Morris, Engine Rebuilders

The next sections give you some ideas about how to find out how you look at the world (your "mental map") and how to make positive changes if necessary.

MENTAL MAPS

We all have beliefs and assumptions about how the world works, how people will act, and how people will react to us. We learn them from our families, our educators, our religious leaders, and from personal experience. These beliefs and assumptions are our mental map. In a group where everyone has a similar mental map, communication is easy. When confronted with someone who has been brought up with a different mental map, we are suddenly on unfamiliar territory. We may not recognize the landmarks.

To get an idea of your mental map, look at the sets of statements below. Make a note of which statement in each pair you recognize as being part of your background. Not all of the sets are exclusive; you might believe both statements or feel neither applies.

- Tradition is more important than change.
  Change is more important than tradition.
- Learning best takes place through repetition.
  Learning best takes place through creativity and exploration.
- Nature should be controlled by humans.
  Humans should harmonize with nature.
- A person's value depends on what they accomplish.
  You don't have to do things to be a valued individual.
- A worker shouldn't have to get along with others to be considered competent.
  It doesn't matter how competent you are if you can't get along with others.
- Friendships are rare and take time and effort to build.

There are no strangers, only friends you haven't met yet.

- Success is measured in material terms.
  Success is measured in spiritual growth.
- Staying young is desirable.
  Respect age and wisdom.
- Those in authority should be challenged.
  Those who have authority know best how to use it.
- If you don't complain no one will respect you.
  If you complain you are not showing respect.
- Talking about your accomplishments is necessary to get ahead.
  Talking about your accomplishments is pushy and inconsiderate.
- Competition pushes people and society to excel.
  Competition pushes people and society to be destructive.
- Formality is a sign of respect.
  Formality is a sign of snobbishness.
- Everyone has their own experience of truth.
  Truth is absolute and universal.
- Tried-and-true methods are better than a shot-in-the-dark.
  Playing it safe leads to stagnation.
- It's not how much you do, it's how well you do it that counts.
  More is better.
- Keep your personal life and work life separate.
  Integrate your work and personal life.
- One person can change the world.
  You can't fight City Hall.
- You should do as much as you can in the time you've got.
  Take more time to stop and smell the roses.
- It is best to make a plan and stick to it.
  As long as everything gets done, organization isn't important.

There are no wrong answers, only different ones. Someone else might have a different set of responses according to the mental map of their culture. If you want an example, ask an employee or co-worker to go through the above list and note their responses, then compare them with your own. If you have a conflict with an employee or co-worker and you can't understand the source of the conflict, try using the same exercise. Comparing your choices may help you put your finger on the cultural values at issue.

LET'S GET PHYSICAL

Being aware of your mental map is particularly important when you make decisions based on physical behaviour. Authority and gender play a large role in some cultures. Here are some common examples of conflicting mental map images that have to do with physical presence.

- Lots of eye contact is usually friendly.
  Too much eye contact is impolite or hostile.
- Standing close to someone is a sign of acceptance.
  Standing close to someone shows a lack of trust.
- A pat on the back is a friendly icebreaker.
  A pat on the back is an unwanted sexual advance.
- A hearty laugh is a sign of a generous spirit.

A loud laugh is aggressive and unpleasant.

- Dressing well is a sign of success.
  Too much attention to appearance is a sign of insecurity.
- A woman who looks a man in the eye is being forthright.
  A woman who looks a man in the eye is being indecent.
- Someone who speaks very quietly is unsure of themselves.
  Someone who knows what they are talking about doesn't need to be loud.
- People feel a more personal connection if you touch them when you speak to them.
  An uninvited touch is an infringement on your personal space.
- An employee who speaks up is showing initiative.
  An employee who speaks up is unhappy.
- Smiling is a way of showing good manners.
  People who smile all the time are phony.

Have you noticed any occasions where these differences have caused conflicts in your workplace? Not all employees will have words for the discomfort that comes from differing values about physical contact and expression. It's important to watch for the non-verbal signs of that discomfort, and find ways to make positive changes before it grows into open conflict. Using the checklist above, and adding to it, may help.

I didn't understand about some of the really practical implications of cultural differences until I worked in another country. Several of us from Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia and France were doing a community development project in an small village in the mountains of the Mezzogiorno of Italy.

I was asked to get some village representatives to go to a meeting in the next valley to discuss getting services like phones, better roads, retaining walls and extended sewage and water lines. I went door to door asking my friends in the village to come with me. They all nodded and chatted but no one would volunteer to go.

Finally the day of the meeting dawned and I was getting ready to set off alone. A group of villagers were gathered in the piazza and one fellow asked me where I was going. I had not slept well and was nervous about making a presentation in Italian. I lost my temper with him and shouted about the meeting and its importance and how much more effective they would have been instead of me.

"But signora, you never said anything," the cafe owner said.

"I told all of you."

"But not like that," she said pointing at my flushed face, my waving arms. "In this village if something is important we speak out loud, we insist. We thought you wanted to be alone, would not want peasants along."

I quickly explained what I wanted in loud tones. The cafe owner and the head of the farmers' collective came with me.

When I returned to Canada to work I found I was very conscious of people from other cultural backgrounds. I treated them with more respect and sought their opinions and advice before making decisions or suggesting any action.

– Ann Harker, community development worker

MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES AND TIPS

Having a cross-cultural workplace doesn't mean learning a whole new set of management skills. On the contrary, clear communication and flexibility are the key elements to any management strategy – but they are particularly important if employees have different skill levels in the shared language of the workplace.

LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

When employees in the workplace do not share a language with each other or with management, there are special issues to consider. Safety, accuracy, production capacity, worker co-operation and workplace camaraderie are all affected by differences in English language proficiency. In cases where problems arise from a lack of common language, managers may wish to arrange for language training for employees, for themselves or for both. There are many avenues for such training. The advantages include increased productivity, increased morale leading to lower worker turnover (which in turn diminishes training costs for new workers), less time lost to accidents and absenteeism, a more skilled work force, and a more enjoyable workplace.

The first thing you have to remember is that you are not hiring minorities, you are hiring people. Our company doesn't consciously go out and look for cultural diversity. We just assess all the applications on personal merit. We hire good people with skills. More than half of our 200 employees are from Eastern Europe and Asia. There are good opportunities for advancement. One of our senior quality control staff is a Romanian who arrived here with minimal English language skills.

Two or three years ago I worried briefly that we were becoming less diverse, that the number of Orientals far outweighed the rest of the employees. But my human resources officer Linda reminded me that I wanted the best and that's what we had. I have kept quiet about it ever since.

Good communication is important in our business. So we went into a partnership program with the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers. It was fascinating. They came in and took three hundred photographs around the plant. Then they based their instruction around what people were doing and the machinery they were using. It helped immensely. When we started we had classes every night. The company paid for the instruction and gave them the last half-hour of the work day and the workers gave one and a half hours of their own time. Now classes are held twice a week.

One aspect that you shouldn't overlook when you have a culturally diverse workforce is the supervisors and managers. I expect three Saturdays a year from them for training. Once again the Mennonites helped. We did a role reversal on the managers. It was fascinating. We brought in a black teacher who was from Swaziland. He addressed the group in Swahili. No one understood a word he said. He kept talking to us. He handed out paper and pencil, talking Swahili all the time. He explained which word meant paper and which meant pencil. I think he introduced the word 'don't'. He seemed to get angry with us. He shouted the words. Everyone in the room felt really stupid. Finally he took pity on us and spoke in perfect English. The lesson was very graphic. We don't communicate by losing our patience, talking fast or shouting at people. We communicate when we speak the same language. It's a lesson our managers will never forget.

Of course, there may be small problems integrating everyone. Some cultural habits can be offensive to others. I'll use spitting as an example. Some cultures see nothing the matter with spitting, others see it as offensive. So the manager has to speak to people and suggest that perhaps, even if it is practically second nature to spit, that for the sake of others in the workplace who find it offensive they could try to stop doing it. Respect and tact is helpful here. Basically, I believe that good management techniques work in any situation.

In many ways I feel quite selfish hiring the way we do, because having a culturally diverse workplace has proved very profitable. We get good people who are very cooperative and want to work.

– Alvin Morris, Engine Rebuilders

Even if formal language training is not required, there are areas where clear language and communication are especially important. The following sections deal with two of those areas: interviewing and training.

INTERVIEWING FOR NEW EMPLOYEES

Interviewing requires an understanding of cultural differences. In some cultures a person may be uncomfortable with direct personal questions such as:

Tell me about yourself.
What are your strengths and weaknesses?
Why should we hire you?
What kind of employee are you?

To focus on the candidate's proven skills, abilities and behaviour, you might want to try the STAR method, also known as behavioural descriptive interviews. STAR stands for Situation, Tasks, Action and Result.

Have the applicant describe a specific situation, explain what the tasks were, the action the applicant took, and the end result. Encourage the applicant to tell the story with enough detail to get a good idea of the applicant's strengths and abilities. Leave enough time for the applicant not to feel rushed; take time to listen.

INTERVIEWING TIPS

- Conduct the interview formally and in private.
- Examine the applicant's accomplishments and check references.
- Avoid judging the applicant's accent, body language, background, handshake, type of eye contact or gestures.
- Give the applicant some idea of what the position involves. Ask for examples of specific situations in past jobs similar to those they are likely to meet in the new position. How did they handle those situations? Use the STAR method and sequence.
- Ask applicants how they think their former co-workers would judge their past performance.
- Assess the applicant's language skills based on the job's requirements.
- Listen to the content of what the applicant is saying.
- Ask the applicant how the position fits their career goals.

TRAINING IN GROUPS

All groups are made up of individuals, no matter how homogeneous they may seem, and effective group training must take into account the needs of each person. A training program has to be developed, or an existing training program might need to be adjusted, to suit the language skill levels of all members of the group. Training is an area where the company has a chance to show commitment to cultural diversity. It is important that trainers have an understanding of issues such as employment equity, stereotypes, cultural barriers, human rights and multiculturalism. If possible, trainers should themselves reflect the diversity in your workplace.

TRAINING GUIDELINES

- Avoid using slang. Speak plainly and without a patronizing tone. Written materials should be simple and direct. Training should be given in the language of the workplace.
- Gradually introduce idiomatic expressions, clichés, puns and jargon only after trainees have grasped the basic material being taught.
- Humour is often rooted in culture and is easily misunderstood by people from other cultures. Use humour only when you are familiar with the group, and be sure everyone in the group understands you are using humour. Be prepared to explain your humour.
- Be organized. Present material in a logical sequence.
- Stay on topic. Give trainees a chance to focus on the specific vocabulary and language of a subject without introducing extraneous materials. Provide a list of common terms and expressions related to the job.
- Plan short sessions. Trainees with a different mother tongue from that of the language of instruction are not only learning new material, they are translating subconsciously. They may not be able to absorb as much information at once.

- Use visual aids (charts, diagrams, graphs, flow charts, handouts or blackboard notes) where possible to illustrate your point. "Pictures speak a thousand words", and simply-written notes can be used for study later. Also, illustrations will help those whose learning style is more visual.
- Where appropriate use hands-on experience and demonstrations. Not only will these give practical back-up to lectures or illustrations, and help link words with their practical applications, but they will help those whose learning style is physical.
- Avoid multiple choice tests. Plan tests which give trainees a chance to practice their language skills with short answers. Correcting each other's tests offers them a chance to increase their reading skills.
- Encourage questions in all forms, but remember that trainees from cultures which value self-effacing behaviour may feel more comfortable submitting written or anonymous questions.
- Use frequent reviewing as a learning tool.

EMPLOYEE EXPECTATIONS

Even in a supportive, culturally-diverse milieu, employees may be reluctant to ask a lot of questions. As an employer, you can anticipate employee needs by providing information about the following:

- If Occupational Health and Safety Policy procedures weren't covered in the training period, be sure new employees are given appropriate instructions and taught to read workplace labels.
- Assure employees that questions related to the job are expected and welcomed, and demonstrate this during training sessions and staff meetings.
- Be sure employees understand how much initiative is expected of them. Cultures, and employers, may treat individual initiative differently.
- It is advisable to choose a common language for the workplace and encourage everyone to use it. A common basis for communication is important. However, employees should be free to speak the language of their choice in conversation and on breaks.
- Talk with employees about accountability. Discuss with your employees what you expect them to tell you about workplace events and information. Avoid assuming that an employee will know what information should be passed on. For instance, cultures treat mistakes differently. In some workplace cultures a mistake is not reported. This could as likely be because the employee feels the mistake is not big enough to bother anyone with or because the employee is afraid of the consequences. Some workplaces encourage employee autonomy, and give latitude in how employees use company resources, while other workplace cultures want a complete record of every paper clip used.
- Discuss promotion policy with your employees. Some workplaces promote solely on the basis of seniority, while others focus on achievement and initiative. Employees may make assumptions based on the norm in their culture. Explain the system your workplace uses.

- Each culture has its own idea of appropriate recognition. Discuss with employees how your company rewards employees. A prominently-displayed photograph praising an "employee of the month" might offend the employee it is meant to reward. Also be aware of the accomplishments of employees whose cultural background encourages them to be modest or invisible.
- Explain to your employees company policy on overtime, holidays, vacations, sick leave and personal business leave.
- Explain dress codes and give your employees guidelines. Some cultures and religions insist on specific items of clothing. Be prepared to be flexible or to justify reasons for insisting on particular dress codes.
- Discuss the level of formality common to your workplace. For example, if first names are used, tell the employee. An employee who feels first names show a lack of respect will use more formal address. Explain that in this work culture, no disrespect is intended by first-name usage. In time the employee may become comfortable with the norm, or the others may become comfortable with that individual's different choice.

Hiring immigrants has worked well for us and I like having them. No matter what country my customers come from, chances are that I will have someone working here who can understand them. About 25 per cent of my staff are from other countries.

At Fabricland, my first requirement is that people be good sewers: I want people who understand Canadian sewing practices and can read patterns. They don't need Canadian experience as long as they know Canadian methods.

English language skills are helpful. They have to be able to communicate with customers and understand their needs. We don't have communications problems because we have many people who speak other languages and they help the newcomers by explaining things in their own language. I have women from Viet Nam, Kenya and many other countries. They don't have any problems fitting in or communicating.

These people really contribute. They have positive attitudes and work hard. There's room to advance in this organization. One of our managers is a woman from Pakistan. I would recommend this kind of hiring practice for other companies.

– Aggie McEathron, Fabricland

UNDERSTANDING AND MISUNDERSTANDING

Everyone has their own communication and working style. An awareness of different cultural patterns can help you understand and resolve conflicting styles.

UNDERSTANDING INSTRUCTIONS

You might assume employees have understood your instructions because they nodded and smiled. In their culture, nodding and smiling may not mean they understood, but may reflect respect for the person speaking, a willingness to try to understand, or simply polite attention. In the same way, an employee may not have any visible change of expression but have understood perfectly. The best way to be sure you have been understood is to have the employee repeat the instructions back to you.

REQUESTS

Be clear and specific when making requests. As in any workplace, there may be some confusion over priorities. An employee may not be able to read the unspoken signs which tell them the difference between orders and suggestions. Be sure the employee has understood what the task is and when it is to be completed.

PROMISES AND REFUSALS

Some cultures consider verbal promises to be an important basis for trust. In other cultures, verbal promises are sometimes taken more casually. Forgetting an offhand promise to meet for lunch, or a delay in writing a promised letter of reference, may be interpreted as a serious lack of respect or a breach of trust. Attitudes toward refusals may also be culturally determined. A refusal may be treated as "never" or as "not right now" or as part of a system where requests are a sort of game: turned down many times but finally granted. It may take employees time to adjust to the culture of the workplace and to understand what a promise or refusal means to their co-workers.

ASSERTIONS AND OPINIONS

Sometimes opinions can be stated as if they are facts, and sometimes facts can sound like opinions. If there are cross-cultural language barriers in the workplace, employees may assume opinions as fact or vice versa.

RESOLVING MISUNDERSTANDING

A positive attitude and an understanding of cultural values goes a long way towards resolving problems. If a misunderstanding has arisen for

reasons similar to those listed in the previous section, here are some guidelines for defusing the conflict.

1. Determine whether the problem involves an individual or a whole group.
2. Ask those involved about the conflict individually and in private. Keep in mind the possible causes of misunderstanding.
3. Be patient and impartial. Reserve judgment until you have the whole story.
4. Assure all parties in the conflict that action will be taken as soon as possible.
5. Bring the parties together and ask them to express their views. Allow equal time for each party to be heard, and discourage interruption.
6. Ask questions until you feel you understand the source of the conflict. Be aware of the effect of your own style of expression. Focus on the conflict.
7. Look for common ground and help employees understand each other's point of view.
8. Summarize the problem and ask the parties involved if the summary is accurate. It may take some time, but keep working until all parties agree on the summary.
9. Express your goals and your desire to help.
10. Explain why the conflict needs to be resolved.
11. Ask each party how they feel the problem could be resolved. Provide a forum for communication.
12. If one party seems to be responsible for the problem, explain what behaviours need to be changed and why. If there is an element of fault or common misunderstanding, negotiate until all parties feel the conflict has been resolved.

The basics of resolving conflict hold true in a cross-cultural setting. The difference is that it might take longer for the parties to understand each other, and you might have to deal with resistance stemming from prejudice. By handling conflicts in an open and impartial way, you show your commitment to a culturally-diverse workplace and provide a model for your employees.

SUMMING IT UP

Because of the variety of the Canadian population, the Canadian marketplace is culturally diverse and the businesses in it both reflect and respond to that diversity. Adapting to cultural diversity makes good business sense. And businesses familiar with cultural diversity issues can also do well in the international marketplace, as economies become more global.

Cultural diversity means everyone. Newcomers make up an increasingly large part of Canadian society, but everyone has a special cultural background and some aspects of that culture may require flexibility in the workplace. Examining our mental maps can help us appreciate and adapt to the diversity of our co-workers or employees.

Good management techniques are the key to managing cultural diversity in the workplace, but there are special issues of language, customs, readiness and flexibility to discover and consider. Special training and communication techniques may be needed for certain employees and certain workplaces. Increased productivity and motivation result from attending to these needs.

Overall, whether locally, regionally, nationally or globally, celebrating cultural diversity in the workplace and the marketplace is good business, and rewarding for everyone.

I started my day care five years ago because I saw a need for Metis- and Indian-specific child care that met the needs of the community. I have a multicultural staff working for me. I've had an African woman who'd just been here a few weeks when I hired her. My director is of East Indian descent from Kenya. I have two Metis staff, a Vietnamese woman, I have had a Lebanese, a Fijian... What that multicultural staff did for me was provide a comfort zone for multicultural children to attend. I've had black children, Chilean children, East Indian children. Right now I have a family from Mexico, from Guatemala, from Chile. I have a lot of Metis and Native Indian children — I'm Metis myself. Because I have multicultural staff these families don't feel any isolation, they don't feel different — because everybody is different.

As a manager I don't see a lot of disadvantages, I see more advantages as they all bring their cultures into the day care. The staff themselves interact socially outside of work and it's usually around cultural events. I have an annual "family picnic" with food from the different cultures. I've learned a lot from my staff, I've learned a tremendous amount.

The staff get along very well. They're non-judgmental, because of their coming from other

countries and what they have had to do to adapt, and they're non-judgmental with the children. I've never experienced a preconception due to a stereotype with any of them— it has never been an issue. It's a nice blend of acceptance of who you are, where you're at, and learning about where you've been.

I hired a lady from Chile. She was in her mid 50s and her English was extremely poor. I found her to be loving and warm, everything everyone would want in a grandmother. The position available did not suit her but I wanted the love, so I transferred another staff out of the nursery and put her in the nursery as a support staff. The babies got all the love she had to offer — it was totally perfect. She and I managed to communicate, and she managed to communicate with the other staff, through non-verbals. When it comes to love there are no barriers of language.

The African lady asked me why I hired her. She was surprised to get a job so quickly, and she had been told that being black and being new in Canada would make it hard for her to get work. But this is what I saw: she had four children, had been in Canada only six weeks, and already had a home, had her children registered in school, and her husband had a job. She had taken care of the needs of the family. That meant to me that she had phenomenal coping skills and organizational skills, was willing to take risks, and was a doer not a talker. Another employer might have said "Well, she just got here..." but I saw those things as strengths. The skills that I saw in her daily living showed to me she was an asset.

When I was hiring my staff I didn't request resume or long term employment elsewhere, because life experience happens for us and we do what has to be done. Child care needs heart. I got into the heart, and because of it I have long-term staff, staff who've been with me since day one.

As a manager you must gain a level of understanding on an individual basis. Learn to understand that particular staff. What the staff may do may be confusing, but if you understand where they come from, what their morals and values are, what their reasoning is, you can then understand what they do. Understanding who that employee is, you'll enhance what they are and grow with it rather than putting barriers up. If you accept what they do and learn to understand why they behave in the manner they do, if it's not morally wrong or life-threatening, then every new learning experience only enhances the day.

– LaVerne Young, Geneva Gardens Day Care

READING LIST

Communicating across Cultures: A Practical Handbook to Cross Cultural Communication Skill, The McDonald Series, The Cross Cultural Communications International 1991

Intercultural Interactions, A Practical Guide, R. Brislin, K.Cushner, C. Cherrie, and M. Yong, Sage Publications 1986.

Profiting in America's Multicultural Marketplace, Sondra Thiederman, Lexington Books 1991.

Managing a Diverse Work Force, John P. Fernandez, Lexington 1991.

In Diversity is Strength: Capitalizing on the new Workforce, The Conference Board of Canada 1992

Future Work: Seven Critical Forces Reshaping Work and the Workforce in North America, Coates, Jarratt, Mahaffie, Jossey-Bass 1990.

Combatting Racism in the Workplace, Barb Thomas, Cross-Cultural Communications Centre, Toronto 1983.

Beyond Race and Gender: unleashing the power of your total work force by managing diversity, R. Roosevelt Thomas, AMACOM, New York 1991.

Managing Workforce 2000: Gaining the Diversity Advantage, David Jamieson, Julie O'Mara. Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco 1991.

National Library of Canada
Bibliothèque nationale du Canada
3 3286 50678 5662

Alberta
ADVANCED EDUCATION AND
CAREER DEVELOPMENT